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ON PAGE A-18

NEW YORK TIMES  
24 SEPTEMBER 1981

## GENERALS TESTIFY IN ESPIONAGE CASE

### Trial Begins for Former Officer Accused of Selling Army's Secrets to Russians

By GREGORY JAYNES

Special to The New York Times

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Sept. 23 — The United States began its case against a former warrant officer charged with espionage today by calling two prominent retired Army generals, both of whom testified that top-secret coding materials he is accused of selling to the Soviet Union were crucial for national defense.

Joseph G. Helmich Jr., who was arrested in July after a one-year investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is charged with selling the communications secrets to the Russians for \$131,000 in 1963 and 1964.

The first witness called was William C. Westmoreland, commander of the United States forces in Vietnam, a four-star general and Army chief of staff when he retired in 1972. He testified that the coding system Mr. Helmich is accused of selling was essential when he was commander of the 18th Airborne Corps, a precursor of the Rapid Deployment Force.

"Otherwise the enemy would be reading our mail," the general said. "He would know where we were going, and how we were going and when we were going and when we were going to get there."

#### 'Key to Everything'

Thomas Rienzi, a retired three-star general who was with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in his last posting, answered a question about enemy possession of the materials by repeating it: "Would it tip off our enemy? It's the key to everything. I mean here you've got the key to the damned door. The answer is yes, Mr. Prosecutor."

The Government contends that Mr. Helmich, who was classified as a crypto-custodian and put in charge of codes and code books in Paris and at Fort Bragg, N.C., in the early 1960's, sold vital parts of a KL-7 crypto system, photographs he had made of the device, and a maintenance manual, operating instructions and coding keys. The military says the KL-7 was "the work horse" for coding in those years.

Mr. Helmich, 44 years old, is charged with three counts of espionage and one count of conspiracy, each of which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

#### Tracked by F.B.I.

In opening remarks, United States Attorney Gary Betz said "the mosaic" of Mr. Helmich's movements were put together by the F.B.I. starting in August 1980, apparently after he was spotted talking to Russian agents in Ottawa. Mr. Helmich, who left the Army in 1966, was working then as a manager of a hardware store in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

From August until February, the F.B.I. interviewed Mr. Helmich nine times.

In a preliminary hearing, he testified that he was forced to cooperate under threat of a 35-year prison sentence. As the meetings continued, he said, the air of hostility receded and there was talk of sending him back to Paris in a counter-intelligence role. In June, he informed the F.B.I. that he was moving to Jacksonville and going to work laying floor tiles. He said he was "stunned" when he was arrested July 15.

Attorneys for Mr. Helmich have asked Federal District Judge Susan H. Black to suppress the evidence from his first seven meetings with the F.B.I. because he was not advised of his rights until the eighth meeting and because he did not have an attorney present. The judge has yet to rule on the motion.

#### 'Ostentatious Wealth'

In sketching the case he intends to present, Mr. Betz said that Mr. Helmich returned from his tour in France with "ostentatious wealth." He said that the defendant bought a Jaguar for himself and another for his wife, who wore expensive clothes.

The couple lived well, the prosecutor said, and Mr. Helmich explained to two Army officers who were asked to look into his affluence in 1964 that he had parlayed a \$2,500 inheritance into an investment in Paris that brought him \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Mr. Betz said Mr. Helmich told the Army that a Parisian business consultant named Claude helped him with the investments. Mr. Helmich told the F.B.I. last year that Claude was really Viktor Lyubimov, a Soviet agent, Mr. Betz said. He told friends in his company that he had won a lottery.

The prosecutor said Mr. Helmich's association with the Soviet Union ceased earning him money in the summer of 1964, when he was given a final payment of \$30,000 or \$40,000 in Mexico City.

Since leaving the Army, Mr. Helmich has held a string of low-paying jobs from Miami to Niagara Falls and back. Florida journalists who tracked down Mr. Helmich's friends and co-workers here and in Georgia, South Carolina and New York have been unable to find anyone who remembers him ever having a substantial amount of money.

#### Indeterminate Damage

What has not come out at the trial, nor from the Pentagon, is the extent of damage the sale of such information would have wrought during the Vietnam years. Mr. Betz has described it as "grave, grave damage."

Outside the courtroom, General Westmoreland refused to speculate this afternoon. Inside, he had said, "One time I had a commanding officer who said if you don't have communications you don't have anything."

Later, General Rienzi spoke of military coding and said, "I went through 42 years in the Army and six wars and I'm still alive. And I think I'm still alive because everybody didn't know what I was doing."